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FOUR SHORT LECTURES

ON

CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

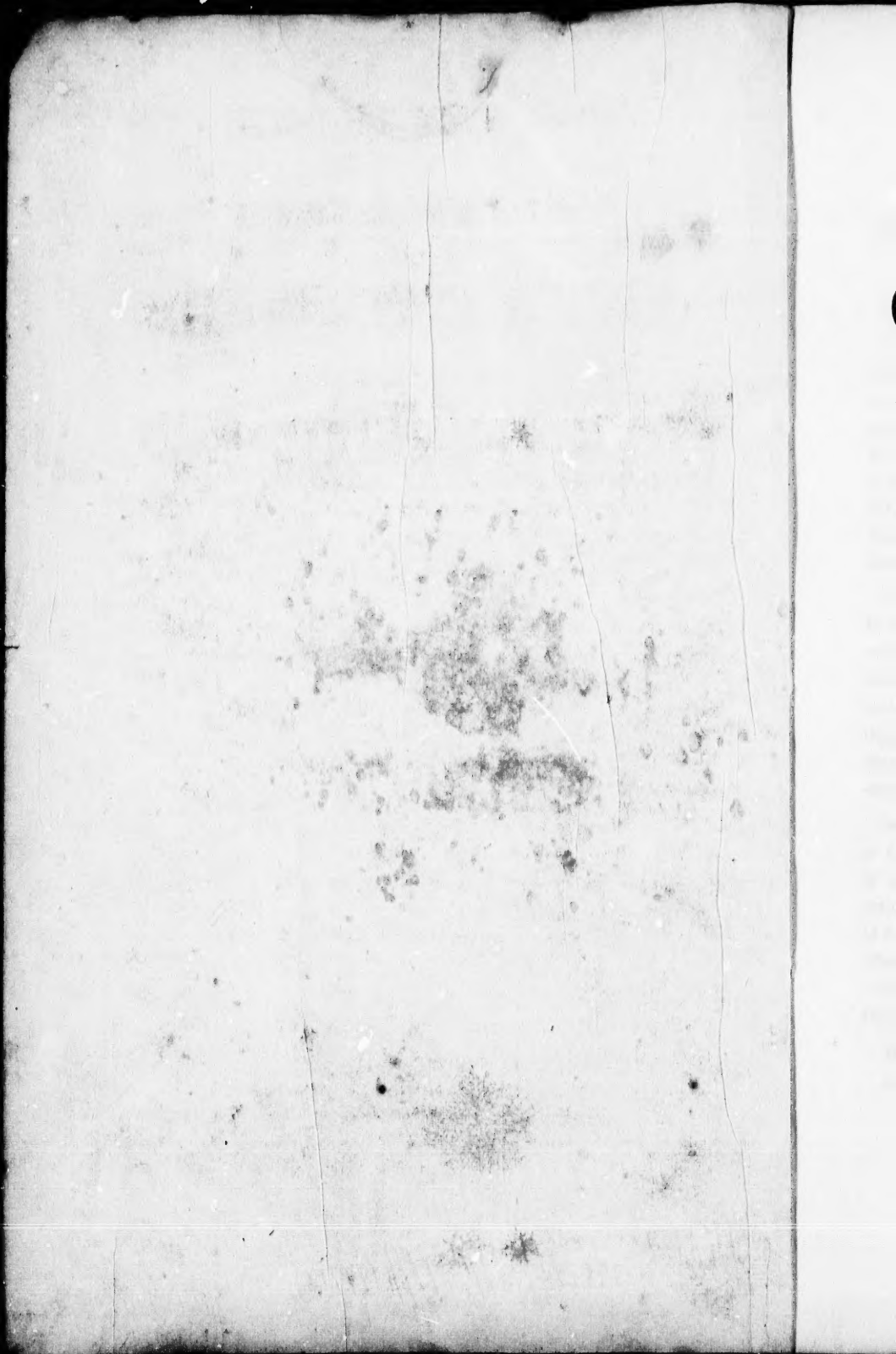
BY THE REV. T. GOLDSMITH,

Minister of the Canadian Wesleyan-Methodist New-Connexion Church.

TORONTO:

PUBLISHED BY BREWER, McPHAIL, & Co.

1848.



FOUR SHORT LECTURES

ON

CHURCH GOVERNMENT ;

COMPRISING :

- I.—THE PACIFIC SPIRIT OF THE CHRISTIAN ;
- II.—SCRIPTURAL VIEW OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT ;
- III.—THE TESTIMONY OF HISTORY ; AND,
- IV.—THE VOICE OF REASON, ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

BY THE REV. T. GOLDSMITH,

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THE following "Lectures" were originally intended for the benefit of the Connexion in the present scene of the writer's labour. This, to some extent, invests the discussion with the appearance of adaptation to wants and circumstances *peculiar* and *local*; yet it is thought that these traits will not be detrimental, either to the interest, or usefulness of the following pages, as the Body in this Province is called upon, year after year, to establish Societies, where we have hitherto possessed no Connexional interest; and under circumstances which will be found closely to resemble those which have characterised the establishment of our cause at Whitchurch.

The first Lecture, on "The Pacific Spirit of the Christian," is preliminary. In the subsequent Lectures, the language of inspiration, the testimony of history, and the voice of reason, are brought to bear on the important subject under discussion. That but little is contained in these pages, compared to the amount of evidence which might be adduced for the establishment of the positions advocated, the writer does not question. But he hopes that the evidence furnished on each topic discussed, will be found, to the unprejudiced mind, both conclusive and satisfactory.

Intended, however, as these pages were, for the exposition of our principles of Church Government in a particular locality, it was not until some friends, in whom the writer placed confidence, had employed repeated and earnest entreaty, that he consented to give them to the public. And should they be found, in any degree, subservient to the promotion of the cause of Religious Liberty, and the extension of a Scriptural form of Church Government, the writer, while giving to God all the glory, will feel his most sanguine expectations realized.

Whitchurch, 1848.

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LECTURE I.

THE PACIFIC SPIRIT OF THE CHRISTIAN.

"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."—
Romans xii. 18.

The pacific spirit recommended by the Apostle, in this passage, has ever been characteristic of true piety. The spirit of Christ can never dwell in that heart where angry and malicious feelings are permitted to obtain and rankle. These are directly opposed to, and can never dwell in connexion with, the spirit of the Saviour. All true Christians love peace; they are children of peace; they are subjects of the Prince of peace; and they are always solicitous for the promotion of peace in the world. The Saviour of men, to show his special regard for the promoters of peace, has pronounced them blessed. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

It is worthy of observation, however, that the Apostle has not left the matter in a latitudinarian sense, but has definitely fixed its bounds. "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." The Apostle well knew that it was impossible, under all circumstances, for the Christian to live peaceably with all men; and, hence, he clearly defines the matter. To live in peace at the expense of Christian principle and truth, would be even worse than war. In the cultivation of this spirit, we should always be careful to distinguish between the time-serving spirit of the fawning sycophant, and the genuine spirit of Christian peace. While the Christian loves peace, and endeavours to promote it, he will never sacrifice great principles for the sake of peace. This would be doing evil, that good might come. The Apostle who wrote this precept, in defence of fundamental principles, "withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed." The Christian, while peaceful, is at the same time courageous and unflinching; and he prosecutes an uncompromising warfare with all that opposes truth and Christian principle. The weapons of the Christian's warfare "are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds." This warfare is not waged against the sinner, but against his wicked principles and practice: in a word, it is waged against sin. As for the sinner, he loves him; he endeavours to reform his character, and convert

him to Christ : he declaims against his vices, to induce him to forsake them ; and he warns him of his danger, that he may escape from it. He never wantonly wounds his feelings, or extorts his tears ; but when he touches these springs of his activity, it is with a design of driving him to his God, and to his duty. Deeply solicitous for the salvation of all, the language of his heart accords with the words of our poet :

“ O that my Jesu's heavenly charms
Might every bosom move ;
Fly, sinners, fly into those arms
Of everlasting love.”

The spirit of the true christian corresponds to the anthem sung by Angels, at the rising of the star of Bethlehem : “ Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men.”

While the spirit of the Christian is purely pacific, his actions correspond with his spirit. Love breathes in all his words : and he manifests in all his actions that he has imbibed the spirit of Him, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. He recompenses to no man evil for evil, but he “ overcomes evil with good.” When his enemy comes, hungry and thirsty, to his door, instead of driving him away empty, he feeds him, and gives him drink ; and by so doing, he “ heaps coals of fire upon his head ;” not to destroy, but to melt him into tenderness and contrition, and to bring him to his duty. Thus the Christian endeavours to live peaceably with all men, whether friends or foes. With those with whom he cannot live intimately and familiarly, in consequence of difference in rank, profession, or sentiment, he lives peaceably ; not giving them occasion to quarrel with him, nor taking occasion to quarrel with them. He studies the things that make for peace, and carefully avoids everything that could give offence. It is not possible, however, for the Christian to preserve peace when he cannot do it without offending God, and wounding his own conscience. “ The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable ;” but it cannot, and will not be peaceable at the expense of Gospel purity. He may be unavoidably striven with : this he cannot help, but it is his constant care that nothing is wanting, on his part, to secure and preserve peace. We are all members of one family, and hence we should seek to promote the peace of the whole family.

I rejoice that I can recognize every son of Adam as a member of that family, with which I stand connected ; and I know of no superiority in that family save that which arises from superior merit. All distinctive names, and earthly titles and honours, will perish in death ; and at the bar of God real piety alone will ensure to us the smile and approbation of our Judge, and admission into eternal glory. I recognise in every child of God a brother, no matter as to his country, colour, clime, age, or rank ; so long as he has the image of Christ, I love him, and can hail him as a fellow-heir of eternal glory. We may differ on many points of minor importance, we may even contend with earnestness for our peculiar views, and still preserve inviolable the pacific spirit of the Christian. When, in minor matters, we cannot see alike, we can agree to differ, and still love as brethren. United in great fundamental doctrines, we rejoice in being possessed of the same spirit, being

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actuated by the same motive, in walking by the same rule, in travelling the same road, and being bound for the same destination. We are united by the strongest, the closest ties ; and, however weak or ignorant, for my life I would not " cause one of the least of these little ones to offend." Saith the Saviour, " better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the depths of the sea, than that he should cause one of the least of these my little ones to offend."

In a world of such vast variety, and abounding with so many prejudices, it is impossible that oneness of sentiment should universally obtain ; hence, it becomes us, as Christians, while we maintain, with unflinching integrity, the great principles of the Gospel, to exercise the spirit of Christian charity toward those who may differ from us in opinion. And, let us never forget that we too are but fallible ; and while we regard our brother as labouring under the influence of wrong views, it is possible that he may be right, and we wrong. Actuated, I humbly trust, by motives and feelings of this liberal character, I have determined to deliver a few Lectures on Church polity. I shall endeavour to take an impartial view of the subject, hoping, by a calm consideration of the point at issue, to advance, in some humble degree, the cause of truth.

I am not, however, unconscious of the fact, that, in entering upon this subject, I shall have to tread upon controverted ground ; and I may, in the course of these Lectures, come in contact with prejudices long since imbibed, and deeply rooted. Nothing could, however, be more foreign from my motives and desires than giving offence to my brethren of other denominations. I feel, that in approaching this subject, I am treading upon delicate ground ; and did I not feel it the imperative demand of duty, I should gladly leave the task, for one better qualified to perform it.

The influence which the Government of a Church must exert upon her vital interests, taken in connection with the fact, that the Discipline of the Church with which I have the honour of standing connected is scarcely known in this place, from its recent introduction, will perhaps be considered a reason sufficiently strong to warrant a Series of Lectures, explanatory of our Church polity. Believing, as I do, that the principles of our Church Government are derived from the Word of God, and calculated to secure the peace and prosperity of a Religious Community, I deem it my imperative duty to explain and enforce these principles. Who, I would ask, that loves Zion, that takes pleasure in her stones and in her dust, would not love to see her under the influence of a discipline that is calculated to promote the peace and harmony of her members ; and, by enlisting and uniting all her energies, and employing them for the suppression of vice, and the promotion of virtue, give her large facilities for meliorating the condition of the wretched, and extending the interests of Messiah's kingdom ? And who, I ask, does not know that the Discipline by which a Church is governed must of necessity exert a powerful influence upon that Church, either for good or evil ? And who, that is acquainted with Ecclesiastical history, since the time of our Saviour, does not know, that just in proportion as the Church has preserved her simplicity,

and a liberal form of Government, she has prospered : and just in proportion as she has permitted her simplicity to degenerate into form, and her liberal Government into despotism, she has become corrupt, and been cursed of God ? Indeed, how could it be otherwise than that the laws by which a Church is governed should exert a powerful and decisive influence upon her welfare ? Among an intelligent people, in the habit of thinking and deciding for themselves, we may apprehend the discussion of a subject of such vast importance, and so nearly associated with the best interest of the Church, will be attended with advantage. I shall, therefore in the discussion of this subject, treat the point with freedom ; and, at the same time, giving due deference to the opinions of my brethren of other Denominations. And I hope, that, should I advance anything contrary to the views of this congregation, that you will weigh it impartially, and compare it with the Word of God, and the voice of reason ; and then let it stand or fall according to its own intrinsic merit. I want nothing to be received for truth, simply because I assert it ; but I would have you weigh the arguments, compare them with Scripture and reason, and then decide for yourselves. Let what may be adduced stand or fall as it agrees with, or opposes God's Word.

While incredulity must be acknowledged and deplored as a radical evil in the world, and prolific of infidelity, it must also be admitted that blind credulity is an evil not less in magnitude, nor less to be deplored, and is as fruitful of infatuation as the former is of infidelity. Think not, my friends, that you are necessitated either to receive all a man advances for truth, or else to regard him as a liar. This does not follow as the only alternative. How many good men have laboured all their lives under false, and even absurd ideas, which in the light of reason and science have vanished away ? But did all this prove these to be bad men ? Not at all : many of them are now in heaven. It only proves they were, what we still are, fallible creatures.

The Word of God not only admits, but even enforces the necessity of our investigating subjects before we believe them. Clothed with the authority of an inspired Apostle, the precept comes to us, " Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good." What could be more pointed and positive than this ? It is not only our privilege, but also our imperative duty to investigate and judge for ourselves.

In the course of these Lectures I shall have occasion to advert to the Word of God, as well as to Ecclesiastical history ; and I really hope the congregation will examine those works for themselves ; to aid in which, I shall name the work from which the quotation is taken. I feel quite confident that a thorough investigation of this subject will be attended with satisfaction and advantage to yourselves, and also with benefit to the general cause of truth.

And here I wish it to be distinctly understood, that the separation from the Wesleyan Body, under the Rev. A. Kilham, which took place fifty years ago, was not on the grounds of doctrines, ordinances, or politics. Church Government, and

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that alone, was the cause of the division; nor did that division occur until they had tried every possible means of obtaining their natural and inalienable rights in the Old Body; and when all their efforts proved futile, they then separated, and organised the New Connexion Church, upon the rational and Scriptural principles of Lay-Representation; thus securing the rights of each, and affording order without despotism, and liberty without licentiousness. This Body, about ten years ago, sent a Missionary (the Rev. J. Aldyman) to Canada, who for some time laboured successfully in Canada East, and was, during a tour in Canada West, formed an acquaintance with the Canadian West yan Methodists, at Hamilton; and finding that they had separated from the Episcopal Methodists, in Canada, on grounds similar to those on which the New Connexion separated from the Wesleyans in England, and were under a Discipline embracing all the great principles of Lay-Representation; and finding a perfect coincidence on these great points, the Union of the two Bodies was proposed. This proposal having been submitted to the next Annual Conference, the Terms of Union were framed; and during the ensuing year submitted to the consideration of the Societies throughout the Connexion. The result was, the Terms of Union being approved, at the next Annual Conference the Union was fully ratified. For, let it be observed, it is impossible for us to form or dissolve Unions, without first laying it, for twelve months, before our members; and a faithful record of their votes is brought to the next Conference, which in all cases decides the matter. Since the formation of this Union things have worked harmoniously; the sun of prosperity has beamed upon us; and our cause has gained, to some happy extent, in numbers, influence, and funds. We have, thank God, lived down, to some extent, the voice of calumny; and the noisy tongue of vituperation has become nearly silent.

I must, for the present, dismiss this topic, to resume it in another Lecture. Having, in consequence of these principles, obtained an important opening in Toronto, and having established a good cause there, our friends on this Circuit, who prize Religious Liberty, were made acquainted with our existence as a Church, and of the principles of our Church Government; and feeling the Discipline of the Wesleyan Body oppressive, and regarding it as anti-Scriptural and absurd, they resolved to throw off the yoke. Regarding, on the other hand, the Discipline of our Church as rational and Scriptural, they sent for us, to organize a Church in this place. We came; and an investigation of the subject proving satisfactory to all parties, we received them into Society, and organized the Whitechurch Circuit.

While we are conscientiously at variance with our Brethren of other Denominations, on the subject of Church Government, we delight to recognize them as children of the same family, and fellow-heirs of eternal glory; and in the great work of saving souls we can heartily co-operate with them, and wish them God speed.

It seems imperative on me, however, to give some explanation, why we have made the matter of Church Government the ground of separation from the Wesleyan Body. It will be the object of the succeeding Lectures to explain this; and

to explain and defend the principles of our Church polity. In the defence of these principles we are truly conscientious; and believing them to be Scriptural and rational, we confidently recommend them to the careful consideration of all who love the cause of God, and desire to promote its peace and prosperity.

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LECTURE II.

SCRIPTURAL VIEW OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

"For one is your master even Christ, and all ye are brethren."—Matthew
xxiii. 8.

Having in my former lecture sufficiently explained my design, I take it for granted, that further prefatory remarks would be superfluous and uncalled for, and hence I at once enter upon the subject.

The passage before us evidently includes two important doctrines; viz., 1st, the supremacy of Christ over the Church; and 2ndly, the equality of the members of the Church with each other. These two doctrines have a natural, intimate, and inseparable connexion with each other. The same principle which teaches us submission to Christ as our *Master*, teaches us also kindness and goodwill to men, as our *brethren*. On the other hand a spirit of rebellion against Christ, is accompanied by a spirit of oppression and tyranny over mankind. Of the correctness of these statements, the world's history furnishes abundant and fearful evidence. Indeed rebellion against Christ and oppression towards men is the same spirit, manifesting itself in diversified action. Both are the legitimate offspring of the same pernicious root; and both aim at the accomplishment of the same wicked end. Nothing is more natural to fallen man, than the exercise of despotic power, and nothing can be more opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, nor can anything more effectually subvert the purposes of Satan, in corrupting and secularizing the church. The blessed Saviour, well knowing how strongly Satan would tempt his disciples, and with what perseverance employ all his subtle power, to gain advantage over them in this, their most vulnerable point, teaches them his devices and guards them against the snare. He turns the proud, pedantic spirit of the Pharisees to the advantage of the disciples, and warns them against following their example. They took pleasure in being called *Rabbi* or *Master*; but, says the Saviour, "Be not ye called *Rabbi*, for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." It will require no extraordinary degree of penetration to perceive that the ardent desire of the Pharisees to receive the praises of men, which the Saviour so strongly condemns, had its foundation in pride and arrogance; and the same spirit which actuated them in saying to their fellow-men, "Stand by thyself, come not near, for I am

more holy than thou," also actuated them in resisting the authority of Christ, and in saying, "We will not have this man, Christ Jesus, to reign over us." Thus we see the same spirit manifesting itself in rebellion against God, and in usurpation and oppression among brethren. The blessed Saviour aims a deadly blow at the very root of this evil, and by asserting his supremacy reduces aspirant man to a level with his fellow man. The supremacy of Christ stands as a perpetual antidote to this evil; and despotism can only obtain in the absence of submission to Christ as the great head of the Church. The history of the Church abundantly proves, that when the spirit of submission to Christ has waned, religious despotism has increased; and as despotism has waxed, piety has waned, till vitality has been superseded by empty form, and brotherly kindness by despotism. And who, that has acquainted himself with this subject, and is actuated by proper motives and feelings, but trembles to see the Church taking even the *first* step in departure from Gospel simplicity and equality, toward formality and despotism? When the first step is taken, a loose rein is given to human arrogance, and none can tell where the matter may issue, or to what lengths of extravagance the Church may be driven. How timely, then, and pertinent these doctrines, "One is your Master even Christ, and all ye are brethren."

Dr. Adam Clarke, one of the ablest Commentators of the day, has given us the following on this passage; and I give it the more readily because he was under a Church discipline securing full legislative and judicial authority to the ministry—a discipline utterly inconsistent with this passage of Scripture, and also opposed to the Doctor's comment upon it. Ye are brethren. "No one among you is higher than another, or can possibly have from me any jurisdiction over the rest. Ye are in this respect perfectly equal." Scott and Henry give comments similar to Clarke's on this passage: and to what other conclusion could they have possibly arrived? The doctrine herein contained is so plain and easy that he that runs may read—the stranger and the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein. The evident design of the Saviour in this passage was to check the risings of pride, importance, and despotism, and to teach the Church their mutual obligations and dependancies, for they were brethren.

The term "Brethren" is frequently employed in the Scriptures, and is applied to the members of the Church of Christ. Our Saviour declares "these are all brethren and he is their master." But what are we to understand by the term? Doctor Clarke tells us it means equality none should hold jurisdiction over the rest as a ruler, for Christ was their master and they were all equal; and we do not feel disposed to oppose the Doctor here, as his view of the subject, in our opinion, is both rational and scriptural. Those are called brethren, in a literal sense, who are born of the same parents, children of the same family, and possessed of equal rights. So in a spiritual sense, they who are born of God are all brethren; they are all sons of God, all servants of Christ, and are consequently all brethren or equal. The bond that unites them in one is by far stronger than all natural ties. They all possess one principle—love to God; they are all influenced by one spirit—the Spirit of God; they are all actuated by one motive—the glory of God; they all

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walk by one rule—the Word of God ; they are all travelling the one road—the way of Holiness ; they are all bound for the same destination—the heaven of Eternal Glory. How utterly alien to the nature of their intimate connexion, to raise up superiorities, and to exercise the spirit of despotism ? Why should distinctive names and party feuds, and man-made offices, distinguish those from each other, who are all one in Christ Jesus ? Our Lord has called his people by a name the very mention of which is designed to destroy every feeling of superiority, to annihilate this spirit of despotism, and to hold in happy compact all the members of his Church. This name was not designed by the Saviour as a mere title or empty profession ; but as the genuine spirit of the Church, which was to be cultivated by all its members, and to be carried out in all their actions toward each other. It is a matter truly surprising, how the Church under such a profession as this should have cultivated a spirit so inimical to their profession.

Our blessed Saviour “ needed not that any should testify unto him of man, for he knew what was in man ;” he fully understood his natural inclination toward despotism, and hence, he doubly guards him on this point. He has not left it merely for our name to remind us of our duty ; but he has given us by the mouth of his Apostle (1 Epistle of Peter, v. 2, 3,) an excellent and positive precept, bearing upon the point. “ Feed the flock of Christ which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly : not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being Lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”

Now, as I know of no passage in all the word of God in which the duties of a Gospel Minister are more clearly pointed out, I shall give a short exposition of this passage. And to prevent the possibility of supposing we had wrested the passage for our own convenience in argument ; we will give you the words of Dr. Clarke.

“ ‘ Feed the flock.’ Do not *fleece* the flock. ‘ Taking the oversight.’ Discharging the office of Bishops, or Superintendents. This is another proof that Bishops and Presbyters were the same order in the Apostles time, though afterward they were made distinct. ‘ Not by constraint !’ The office was laborious and dangerous, especially in the times of persecution. It is no wonder then, that even those that were best qualified for the office, should strive to excuse themselves with a *genuine*, ‘ I am unwilling to be a Bishop.’ ‘ Not for filthy lucre.’ Could the office of a Bishop in those early days, and in the time of persecution, be a lucrative office ? Does not the spirit of God lead the Apostle to speak these things rather for posterity, than for that time ? But of a ready mind, doing all for Christ’s sake ; and through love to immortal souls. Neither as being Lords over God’s heritage. This is the voice of Saint Peter, in his Catholic Epistle, to the Catholic Church. According to him there are to be *no Lords over God’s heritage* ; the Bishops and Presbyters who are appointed by the Head of the Church, are to feed the flock, to guide and defend it, not to fleece and waste it ; and they are to look for their reward in another world, and in the approbation of God in their consciences. And in humility, self-renunciation, and heavenly-mindedness, they are to be ensamples, types to the flock, moulds of a heavenly form into which the spirit and lives of the flock may be cast, that they may come out after a perfect pattern. We do not ask

does the church that arrogates to itself the exclusive title of Catholic, and do its supreme Pastors who affect to be the successors of Peter, and the Vicars of Jesus Christ, act in this way? They are in every sense, the very reverse of this. *But we may ask, do other Churches which profess to be reformed from the abominations of the above, keep the advice of the Apostle in their eye? Have they Pastors after God's own heart, who feed them with knowledge and understanding? Do they feed themselves and not the flock? Are they Lords over the heritage of Christ, ruling with a high ecclesiastical, secular hand? Disputing with their flocks about penny-farthing tithes and stipends rather than contending for the faith once delivered unto the saints? Are they heavenly moulds into which the spirit and conduct of their flock may be cast?"*

What a hideous picture has the Doctor here drawn! and what would have been his feelings of horror, had he anticipated that in so short a time his successors would have answered so well to his portraiture? "*Ruling with a high ecclesiastical, secular hand*" which awakened the Doctor's feelings of abhorrence, has become a *characteristic mark* of his successors. Witness their *unions* and *rendings* in connexion with their strife for College endowments, and Government *stipends*! Witness the prostitution of their ecclesiastical influence, to political purposes for filthy lucre's sake; and judge whether the Doctor wrote prophetically of his own successors! How strangely opposed is such a course of conduct to the spirit of the Gospel? If there is one evil against which the Church has been more frequently warned in the scriptures, than another, it is despotism; and yet, this is the very one into which she has most frequently plunged. Most of the rendings and divisions which have occurred in the Church, have been the legitimate consequences of her despotism and tyranny. How could it be otherwise, when the Gospel by which she professes to be governed, stands in direct opposition to her conduct? Light cannot be more opposed to darkness, than the Gospel is to despotism. Hear the words of Christ to his Disciples (Matt. xx. 25, 26, 27, 28.) "But Jesus called them unto him and said, ye know that the Princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great, exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whoso will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whoso will be chief, let him be your servant. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many."

We cannot fail to perceive from this passage, that the Church is not to be governed by arbitrary power, but "in humility and brotherly love, and with the spirit of Christ." Despotic power is characteristic of heathenism, and in perfect contradistinction to Christianity. This existed among the Princes of the Gentiles; but Christ says to his Church, it shall not be so among you. Proud despotic spirits are to be put down, and *kept down*; for "he that will be great among you, let him be your minister," or deacon, the lowest ecclesiastical order: "and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant," or lowest secular officer. How strongly has the Saviour here guarded the Church against the invasion of arbitrary power? Every kind of Lordship and spiritual dominion over the Church of Christ, is destructive to her interest, and altogether antichristian.

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The Apostles regarded themselves as servants of the Churches of Christ, and uniformly speak thus of themselves. Paul says, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord: and ourselves, your servants, for Jesus' sake." He seems quite content with this; not that he was compelled by necessity, nor that he was inferior to any of them, but "for Jesus' sake." He was willing to be as his Lord; and he came as the servant of all; and that minister who, not willing to be a servant of the Church seeks to *Lord it over God's heritage*, has strangely forgotten his office, and is unworthy the name of a minister. God says *ye shall not be Lords over God's heritage; but aspirant man says, my title is Lord Bishop, and I will have it*; and even among those who have not assumed these titles how many have arrogated to themselves the power, and looked down with contempt upon all those who have dared to differ with them in opinion, and receive the testimony of Scripture instead of their dogmas. And these have been unsparing in their antichristian epithets of opprobrium, such as, "illegitimate," "Ryanites," "Kilhamites," "Oppositionists," "Divisionists," &c. How unlike the spirit of the illustrious Apostle Paul, and his infinitely more illustrious Master. These both professed to be the *servants* of all, but our modern aspirants profess to be *masters* of all; and are unwilling to grant to those who think for themselves the name of Christian. Dogmatism, is to a fearful extent, the logic of those clerical despots; and they spare not their anathemas upon any who will not crouch in submission at their feet. We should almost think from the spirit and conduct of those ecclesiastical dignitaries, that they had never read this passage, "ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake;" or, if they had seen it, they did not believe it. To accommodate this passage to their high-handed measures, we should have to render it "and ourselves your masters for our sakes!" How strange that men who go about preaching the Gospel to others, should have so completely forgotten their office; and so reversed the doctrines of the Gospel they profess to preach; thus making merchandize of Christianity, and sacrificing the peace and prosperity of the Church at the *shrine of clerical ambition*! It is notorious that the church has been despoiled of her rights, by the usurpations of aspiring and despotic ecclesiastics; the brotherhood has been broken; and superiorities have been set up utterly alien to the nature of the Christian compact. The Church where all should be affection and confidence, has been, by the exercise of despotic power awakened to suspicion, and filled with strife and contention. The membership, robbed of their inalienable rights, have been bound as vassals to priestly ambition, frowned into submission to their spiritual rulers, and made subservient to all the *vascillations* of a mercenary Priesthood. How strangely has the order of things been reversed? For Christian liberty, here is priestly despotism; for enlightenment and freedom, here is ignorance and infatuation; for peace and concord, here is strife and contention; and instead of seeking the glory of God and the salvation of souls, here is continued strife for emolument and power. And how gravely too, do those "legitimate" ministers plead "submit yourselves" as an injunction of Scripture, thus endeavouring to turn the word of God into subserviency to their unhallowed despotism.

As this passage is one frequently quoted in defence of a corrupt and despotic

spirit, we shall glance at it. It occurs in Hebrews xiii. 17, as well as in several other places, nearly to the same import. I have made choice of this passage for examination, as I presume it is the one generally selected for the support of priestly *tyranny*? It reads as follows, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you."

Let us examine this passage. The Apostle speaks of their peculiar office—watching over souls, and their faithfulness in discharging that duty. Their object was the salvation of souls, and they continually kept in mind the fact that they must give account. They watched over their souls; not over their coffers, for filthy lucre's sake. They were put in care of souls, and it was their province to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine," and in order that the church might profit by their faithful watching and labour, they must give heed to their teachings, and submit to Gospel requirements, and especially so, as they were acting from the purest motives, and only seeking the salvation of their souls. They were faithful, "watching as those that must give account." I need not ask, do our modern despots watch over souls, as those that must give account, or do they watch for filthy lucre, and practice the hidden things of dishonesty? If their spirit and practice do not comport with the spirit and practice of those of whom the Apostle speaks, then the passage can have no bearing on the point, for it was only on the ground of their faithfulness that the Apostle urges submission. But even admitting our clerical aspirants had full title to this passage, yet what does it secure to them but the office of watching for souls, not Lording it over them: and it connects with this office the most fearful responsibilities, "they must give account." As the ambassadors of Christ, the people are to hear and give heed to their doctrines in order that they may profit thereby. Doctor Clarke assures us that the term ruler here means none other than guide, who speaks the doctrines of God; and then he makes the following pertinent observations, "He is not fit to rule, who is not capable of guiding." Would those who plead so hard for clerical authority, pretend to say that this passage includes the idea that we should submit our will and judgment to their decision, and let them think and decide for us? This would imply that they were infallible teachers, and clearly exhibit what they are so careful to conceal; viz., that the system has its foundation in Popery!

The consistency of this disposition of the passage will still further appear, by consulting some parallel passages. In 1 Peter v. 5, we have the following, "Likewise ye younger submit yourselves unto the elder; yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." While the Apostle requires that the younger submit themselves to the elder, he also requires that they all be subject to one another. They are united in a fraternity, the nature of which requires reciprocal submission; and none are exonerated from this requirement. The evident design of the Apostle, in this passage, was to guard the Church against anything like a spirit of superiority or intolerance; for this would be inconsistent among brethren. The

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argument by which the Apostle enforces this precept confirms our view of it, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." The whole drift of the passage is against pride, intolerance, and despotism. We might cite a number of passages, all bearing upon this point, and confirming our position; but we deem it needless to summon further evidence upon a point so clear.

How can any Gospel Minister, in the face of so many indubitable evidences in favour of Christian equality, plead for full legislative and judicial power to the Ministry? How dare they, in the face of that passage which says, "Neither as being Lords over God's heritage," grasp and exercise despotic rule over the Church of Christ, and require passive submission to their lordly sway? How dare they usurp the prerogatives of Jesus Christ, as the Head of the Church; while he emphatically declares to them "one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren?"

The example of inspired Apostles, who were taught by Christ personally, must have an important bearing upon the point at issue. Did they exercise legislative or judicial authority over the people, and independent of them? To this question the Word of God gives a clear and unequivocal answer in the negative. We fearlessly challenge our opponents on this question to point out one instance in which the Apostles assumed to themselves the independent power of ruling the Church. On the contrary, we invariably find them, in matters of legislation, acting in conjunction with the Church.

In the 15th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we are furnished with an account of Apostolic usages in these matters. On the important question, whether the converted Gentiles should be circumcised, and compelled to keep the law of Moses, the *Apostles*, and *Elders*, and *Church* met to confer; none arrogating to themselves the authority of deciding the important matter alone. This is usually called the first General Council of the Christian Church. It assembled by the immediate command of God; for Paul tells us, in Galatians ii. 1, 5, that they went up to Jerusalem by revelation, and the question they met to discuss was paramount in its bearings upon the Church. The character of this first legislative assembly of the Christian Church must have an important bearing upon the point in hand; and especially so, when we consider it was under the immediate direction of Divine inspiration. The Apostle Paul had Titus with him on this occasion, and how many others we cannot tell. A number of laymen seem evidently to have accompanied them to Jerusalem, to conference: how many we cannot determine. This revelation seems to have been given, not to Paul, but to some individual in the Church at Antioch. This subject occasioned no small discussion and disputation between Paul and Barnabas; and they lately determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem, unto the Apostles and Elders, about this question. Now, observe the Apostles did not themselves determine, independently of the people; but the Church decided this question. Again, the Apostles did not go alone to confer with the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem; but certain other of the Church accompanied them; and that

by the determination of the Church, by whom they were delegated to go to Jerusalem. The reception with which they met, clearly shows that the Church at Jerusalem was under a discipline similar to that from which the Apostles and delegates were sent. We are told, in the 4th verse, that they were received in Jerusalem of the Church, and of the Apostles and Elders. And though it is said the Apostles and Elders came together, for to consider this matter, without expressly saying with the whole Church, yet, when a decision of the matter was required, by whom was this decision formed? In answer to this question, we are expressly told, "Then pleased it the Apostles and Elders, with the *whole Church*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas, surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren."—22nd verse.

In the discussion of this subject, James seems to have taken a very prominent part, and to have suggested what should be done in the matter; and then the whole assembly, confirming his decision, determined how it should be carried into effect. James did not determine this question by virtue of his office, but by the weight of his argument; and the whole legislative assembly, convinced of the correctness of his views, at once received them, and adopted measures for carrying them out. Now, what, I ask, does this prove, but this, that the first legislative assembly of the Christian Church was composed of Ministers and *Laymen*; and let it be borne in mind that this assembly was under the influence of Divine inspiration. Paul says, "They went up by revelation." If the whole Church was not included in this assembly, then how comes it to pass, that in determining the point at issue, the names of the Apostles and Elders, and the *whole Church* are so distinctly mentioned? If, then, it be clear that the first legislative assembly of the Christian Church was composed of Ministers and Laymen, who acted in co-operation, what could have since arisen to supersede this co-operation? Are our modern ecclesiastics possessed of greater wisdom than inspired Apostles? Surely they dare not presume this. Is not the reason obviously this, that among modern ecclesiastics there is more of arrogance, and less of real piety, than among the primitives?

If any should still be inclined to doubt whether any but the Apostles and Elders were admitted into this legislative assembly of the Christian Church, then I submit to them the following considerations, which cannot, I apprehend, fail to convince every candid mind, of ordinary enlightenment, that the whole Church were present. Observe the manner in which the Apostle Peter addresses the assembly. He speaks as though there must have been many present, and those promiscuous too. Hence he says, "Men and Brethren." Who would suppose he would thus address Apostles and Elders only? In the 12th verse, we are told "Then all the *multitude* kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul." Now, who will suppose there was a "*whole multitude*" of Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem? The number of Apostles and Elders in this assembly must have been very small. The conclusion to which we are unavoidably led is, that the whole Church was there; and this conclusion is placed beyond contradiction by the manner

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in which they decided the question, "Then pleased it the Apostles and Elders, with the whole Church," &c. The time, also, is definitely pointed out, "Then" (i. e. when James had concluded); so that, beyond contradiction, they must all have been there.

The matter being clear that they were there, let us examine what authority they exercised in this assembly. They exercised the authority of determining the question, in conjunction with the Apostles and Elders; for "Then pleased it the Apostles and Elders, with the whole Church," &c.

I must confess I am truly surprised, that in a matter so clearly explained, by Divine precepts, and by the example of inspired Apostles, that the Church should have strayed so manifestly. If any are ignorant in this matter, their ignorance must be *wilful*; consequently, *criminal*. And ignorance, under such circumstances, cannot palliate crime. You are not required, passively, to receive all that a designing Priesthood may tell you, without ever investigating for yourselves; but you are to "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." God's Word has cast such a flood of light upon the subject, that you are left without excuse. "The stranger and the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein."

Let me, in concluding this Lecture, guard you against one of the most prevalent errors on this point; and that is, that "Church Government is one of the non-essential matters in which we have a right to differ; and which is not immediately connected with the prosperity of the Church." No candid individual can fairly weigh this expression, and believe it. It carries upon its front its own refutation. If the discipline of a Church have no bearing upon her prosperity, then, I ask, what can have? If the laws by which she is governed do not affect her interest, then why subject her to a discipline at all? The fact is, the idea is so perfectly ridiculous, that you cannot believe it. Every candid and intelligent individual must confess that the laws by which any confederation is governed must exert a decisive influence upon its destiny.

Then I must insist upon it, that until a better discipline than God's Word is discovered, we are bound to submit to the discipline of the Bible. Now, who dares presume that he has invented a better code of laws, by which to govern the Church, than that furnished by Deity? What consummate folly and wickedness. And yet, when men violate God's discipline, and supersede it with their own, their actions declare they conceive their own to be the better mode. It was said by Doctor Johnson, "that the only difference between the Church of England and the Church of Rome was this, that while the Church of Rome was infallible, the Church of England was never in the wrong." And the only difference between the man who says he knows more than God, and acts accordingly, and the man that acts it, while he denies it, is this, the one is an honest man, and the other a base hypocrite. Now, if you believe God's discipline to be the best, it is imperative on you to adopt it.

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LECTURE III.

THE TESTIMONY OF HISTORY ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

" Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."—Jeremiah vi. 16.

While it is true that the antiquity of a government or usage is not always to be regarded as sufficient proof of its purity and utility, yet the usages of inspired Apostles, and of the Primitive Church, may be safely relied on as a proper guide, and adopted, as the best precedents to the Church, at the present day. Who dares suppose that he has found out a more excellent system than the Gospel, which was taught by Christ, and acted upon by inspired Apostles? And yet all who depart from the simplicity of the Gospel plan loudly declare, by their actions, that, in matters of Ecclesiastical economy, they are wiser than their Maker. Is it not a lamentable, yet notorious fact, that the Church possesses little of her primitive immunities and simplicity? Liberty has been superseded by despotism; and Gospel simplicity by perplexing form. The hasty fangled notions of men have been adopted, to the exclusion of pure Gospel principles; and vital godliness has given place to senseless ceremonies. Men have been more anxious for novelties, than for pure, unadulterated Gospel truth; and hence "they have sought out many inventions;" and the infatuated multitude have received their crude notions for Gospel truth, without ever comparing them with the Word of God. However grave the censure, it is yet too obvious to be passed by in silence, that Gospel principles have been, in many cases, sacrificed to human ambition: the house of God has been made "a house of merchandise:" the Church has been secularized; and all her ordinances made to feed the arrogance of clerical despots. Hence all the indulgences, and absolutions, and masses, and senseless ceremonies, all bowing at the shrine of "mammon," and supplicating friendship with the world, which is enmity against God; while an infatuated people have been made to tremble at the glare of their ceremonies, and, without investigating for their foundation and authority, they have bowed submission to the sway of arrogant priests. How dangerous is it to take the first step in departure from the simplicity of the

Gospel, toward formality and despotism ! Such is the egotism of the human heart on the one hand, and the willingness of the multitude to receive the dogmas of men for Gospel truth on the other, that when the first step is taken, time alone can determine its issue.

In proof of the correctness of these statements, I shall direct your attention, in this Lecture, to some of the most authentic ecclesiastical records, which furnish but too abundant evidence of the truth of these assertions. So abundant are the passages of history bearing upon this point, that our greatest difficulty lies in making a proper selection of a few, from the many that might be given, so as on the one hand to carry full conviction to every mind, and on the other to avoid burdening the mind with a redundancy of testimony.

In order that we may render the investigation the more intelligible and easy, we shall notice, in the first place, that in proportion as the Church forsook her original simplicity, and degenerated into form, she lost her vitality; and, in the second place, show, that as she exchanged vitality for form, she became despotic in government; arrogating to herself the prerogatives of the Almighty on the one hand, and trampling on the rights of the people on the other.

I. As the Church forsook her original simplicity, and degenerated into form, she lost her vitality.

It cannot be considered irrelevant to our present design briefly to state the simplicity of Church ordinances in the time of the Apostles. Church ordinances in the time of the Apostles were few and simple; only those being used which were instituted and commanded by the Lord Jesus himself. They were only two in number—Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These were designed to exist coeval with the Church, without anything superadded to them, or diminished from them. I cannot consider these as mere ceremonies, nor yet as symbolic representations, without any design; but also as ordinances, accompanied with a sanctifying influence upon the hearts of all true Christians. The Gospel dispensation is contrasted with the Mosaic by the fewness and entire simplicity of its ordinances. In this consists no mean part of the glory of the Gospel, that it is so plain and easy that "the stranger and the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." Here is no splendid glare of ordinances to attract the eye, and lead off the mind from God; but these simple ordinances tend to frame our minds for worship, by rendering them spiritual, and concentrating them in God. While the Church preserved the simplicity of her ordinances, she retained her power, and her labours were eminently successful. Then she depended not on the glare of her ordinances to give her success, but on the purity of her doctrines, and the power of God. Men and means were all thrown into the shade, and Christ exhibited in full light to the people. The Apostles having preserved the simplicity of the Gospel, and laboured to exhibit Christ to the people, had the pleasing satisfaction of saying, ere they had quit the field of conflict, and laid off their armour, "The Word has gone to the ends of the earth." But in process of time, when

the Church became numerous, and, to some extent, wealthy, she began to relax her energies; and, becoming indolent, she sank down into form, and lost her original vitality and power. A time-serving spirit was permitted to obtain, to the destruction of the uncompromising spirit of the Gospel. In order to extend the Gospel among the Pagan nations, they incorporated into the Christian Church many of their senseless forms and ceremonies, and thus corrupted the ordinances of the Church, in order to accommodate it to Paganism. They seem to have forgotten that their strength and purity were secure only while they possessed their entire distinctiveness from the world; and accommodating herself to something of Paganism, in order to Christianize the Pagans, she became polluted; and instead of converting the Pagans to Christianity, the Christian Church became, to an alarming extent, corrupted by Paganism. So soon as the Church began to accommodate herself to the principles and practices of the world, she began to retrograde in piety; and in proportion as she continued to corrupt and multiply forms, she lost her power, until she at length possessed innumerable rites and ceremonies, borrowed from Judaism and Paganism, and became fairly characterized by the "Scarlet Lady, drunk on the blood of the saints." The Church has never yet attempted a compromise with the world in which she has not suffered serious loss. How could it be otherwise, when one is in direct opposition to the other? "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? or what agreement hath the temple of the living God with idols?" How utterly inconsistent is such an accommodation of the Gospel to Paganism, in the face of these Scriptures? The Holy Spirit has given us a precept directly to the point, prohibiting all such desecrations of the Christian Church—"Be not conformed to this world." The deleterious influence of such antisciptural alliance of the Church and the world, upon her piety and success, the history of the Church abundantly demonstrates.

Mosheim informs us, that in the second century the beautiful simplicity of the Church "began gradually to be effaced, by the laborious efforts of human learning, and the dark subtleties of human science." He also informs us, that "several tenets of a chimerical philosophy were imprudently incorporated into the Christian system. This disadvantageous, this unhappy alteration of the primitive simplicity of the Christian religion was chiefly owing to two reasons; the one drawn from pride, and the other from a sort of necessity. The former was the eagerness of certain learned men to bring about a re-union between the doctrines of Christianity and the opinions of the Philosophers; for they thought it a very fine accomplishment to be able to express the precepts of Christ in the language of the Philosophers, Civilians, and Rabbins. The other reason that contributed to alter the simplicity of the Christian religion was the necessity of having recourse to logical definitions and nice distinctions, in order to confound the sophistical arguments which the infidel and the heretic employed; the one to overturn the Christian system, and the other to corrupt it."

Whatever motives may have induced the admission of these tenets into the system of Christianity, yet the frightful effects with which this change was followed demonstrates the alliance to have been unholy. We might adduce many examples; but one may suffice for our present purpose. "The blessed Saviour and his Apostles simply taught that the souls of good men were, after their departure from their bodies, received into heaven, and the souls of the wicked sent down to hell: this was sufficient to satisfy the disciples of our Lord; for they had more of piety than curiosity, and were satisfied with the knowledge of the fact, without any desire to pry into its secret reasons. But this plain doctrine was soon disguised, when Platonism began to infect Christianity. Plato had taught that the souls of illustrious men and eminent philosophers alone ascended immediately after death into the mansions of light and felicity; while those of the generality, weighed down by their lusts and passions, sunk down into the infernal regions, from whence they were not permitted to emerge before they were purified from their turpitude and corruption. This doctrine was seized with avidity by the Platonic Christians, and applied as a commentary upon that of Jesus. Hence a notion prevailed that the martyr only entered upon a state of happiness immediately after death; and that for the rest a certain obscure region was assigned, in which they were to be imprisoned until the second coming of Christ; or, at least, till they were purified from their various pollutions. This doctrine, enlarged and improved upon by the irregular fancies of injudicious men, became a source of innumerable errors, vain ceremonies, and monstrous superstitions."

From this passage of history we cannot fail to see the fatal results of digression from Gospel simplicity. But fearful as these consequences were, they were still but faint preludes of more serious troubles. The flood-gates of corruption once thrown open, poured forth a flood of corrupt doctrine and senseless ceremony into the Church, until she became corrupt to the very core.

To these quotations we might add many more of the same import, but we must let one or two brief extracts suffice. To follow it out would require not only one Lecture, but many, and would form a voluminous and important history. We cannot, however, leave this part of our subject without giving one or two brief extracts from Mosheim, taken from near the close of the second century. The evils to which we refer resulted from the unholy alliance of Christianity with Paganism. "In order to remove the calumny and opprobrium which the Jewish and Pagan priests cast upon the Christian, on account of the simplicity of their worship, estimating them little better than Atheists, because they had no temples, altars, victims, priests, nor anything of that external pomp in which the vulgar is so prone to place the essence of religion, the Rulers of the Church adopted certain forms and ceremonies, that thus they might captivate the senses of the vulgar, and be able to refute the reproaches of their adversaries. This was a very awkward, and, indeed, pernicious stratagem: it was obscuring the native lustre of the Gospel, in order to extend its influence; and making it

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to loose in point of real excellence, what it gained in point of popular esteem." This shameful prostitution was followed with corresponding results. About this time arose the Aestetics, "distinguished by their superstition and personal austerities. They looked upon themselves as debarred the use of things which were lawful for other Christians to enjoy; such as wine, flesh, matrimony, and commerce. They thought it their indispensable duty to extenuate the body by watchings, abstinence, and hunger." As these waxed, Christianity waned, till vitality was swallowed up of superstitious ceremonies. "The priests of this order were doomed to perpetual celibacy, and the rigor of unprofitable penances and mortifications." To complete this picture of iniquity, "the Platonists and Pithagorean Christians held it as a maxim *that it was not only lawful, but even praiseworthy to deceive, and even to use the expedient of a lie, in order to advance the cause of truth.*" Here we see, with the forms of Judaism and Paganism, the monstrous absurdities and flagrant crimes peculiar to those systems brought into the Christian Church, and covered with a profession of sanctity. In order to vie with the Heathen, the Christians gave their ceremonies a kind of mystic air, and so put it on an equal footing with Paganism. Hence they gave the name of *mysteries* to the institutions of the Gospel: the Eucharist, especially, they decorated with that title. They not only adopted many of the names of the Pagan worship, but even many of the Pagan ceremonies; and thus, to vie with the Heathen, they brought down the standard of Christianity, obscured the native lustre of the Gospel, and detracted from the real excellence of the Gospel system.

We should feel a pleasure in following up the records of history, and giving copious extracts from each century, showing the reciprocal action of formality and corruption upon each other; but this would exceed the limits of one Lecture. We can only say, on this point, that as forms multiplied, corruptions increased, till Christianity became at last superseded by the corruptions of Judaism and Paganism: the Church became secularized, and turned into the hotbeds of infidelity and superstition. The ordinances of the Church were made merchandise of, to spend upon the lusts of arrogant and tyrannical priests. Whoever is acquainted with Ecclesiastical history must be satisfied of the correctness of these statements.

Unwilling to exceed the bounds of brevity in this Lecture, we must proceed to consider,

II. *That as the Church exchanged vitality for form, she became despotic in her government; arrogating to herself the prerogatives of the Almighty on the one hand, and trampling upon the rights of the people on the other.*

We observed, in a former lecture, that the same principle that teaches us submission to Christ, as our MASTER, teaches us also kindness and goodwill to men, as our brethren. On the other hand, a spirit of rebellion against Christ will be associated with a spirit of despotism over mankind. These are but modifications of the same wicked spirit developing itself in diversified action. Of the correctness of this, we shall adduce the testimony of history.

It will be readily conceded, even by our opponents, that the Church in the days of the Apostles approached nearer to perfection in Gospel purity than at any time since; and hence the government of the Church was more pure and equitable at this time than at any succeeding period of her history. These are incontestible principles, admitted on all hands; and hence a view of the laws by which she was governed, at this epoch, must be advantageous to our present research. In our last Lecture we furnished a view of the first Christian Council, and demonstrated, from Scriptural testimony, that it was composed of *Ministers and LAYMEN*; all of whom were concerned in the decisions of the point at issue. Inspiration has thus furnished us with examples of primitive usages; and has established the Government of the Church upon principles of responsibility. We shall add to this a few quotations from Ecclesiastical history. Mosheim has given us the following beautiful account of the Council held at Jerusalem, just referred to. I give you his own words. "If, however, it be true that the Apostles acted by Divine inspiration, and in conformity with the command of their blessed Master (and this no Christian can call in question), then it follows that the form of Government which the primitive Church borrowed from that of Jerusalem, the first Christian assembly, established by the Apostles themselves, must be considered as of Divine institution." In reference to the nature of this institution, he tells us, "There reigned among the members of the Primitive Church, however distinguished they were by worldly rank and titles, not only an amiable harmony, but also a perfect equality." Again, he tells us, "In those early times, every Christian Church consisted of the *people*, their *leaders*, and the ministers or deacons; and these, indeed, belong essentially to every Society. *The people undoubtedly were the first in authority; for the Apostles showed, by their own example, that nothing of moment was to be considered or determined without the consent of the assembly.*" Again, he tells us, "It was the assembly of the people that chose their own rulers and teachers, and received them by a free and authoritative consent, when recommended by others. The same people rejected or confirmed, by their suffrages, the laws that were proposed by their rulers to the assembly; excommunicated profligate and unworthy members of the Church; restored the penitent to their forfeited privileges; passed judgment upon the various subjects of controversy and dissension that arose in their community; examined and decided the disputes that happened between the Elders and Deacons; and, in a word, exercised all that authority which belongs to such as are invested with sovereign power." What a striking contrast does this form with the Church polity of succeeding ages, nay, even of the present age. Here were no clerical tyrants, lording it over God's heritage, making merchandise of the Church, and transferring the people to other rulers, for filthy lucre's sake. These barbarous outrages of the nineteenth century, upon the rights of men, would have startled the Christians of the first century. And how does the enormity of such outrages increase when we consider that the usages of the primitive Church were directed by Divine inspiration, and are, consequently, binding upon the Church of every age. Hence every exercise of des-

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potic power in the Church is not only outraging the rights of the people, but also rebelling against the authority of God.

As to the offices in the Christian Church, in those early days, the highest was that of Bishop or *President*; for at this early age there were no "*Lord Bishops*." They respected and observed the Word of God, which forbids "Lords over God's heritage." Mosheim says, "Let none, however, confound the Bishops of this primitive and golden period of the Church with those of whom we read in the following ages. For, though they were both distinguished by the same name, yet they differed extremely; and that in many respects. A Bishop, during the first and second centuries, was the person who had the care of one Christian assembly; which at that time was, generally speaking, small enough to be contained in a private house. In this assembly he acted, not so much with the authority of a *master*, as with the zeal and diligence of a faithful *servant*." How strangely do the clerical rulers of the present day differ from this? They possess more of the arrogance and despotism of Lords, than of the zeal and faithfulness of servants. In the first century, the diocese of a Bishop was not a Province, but a congregation: his office was not that of a master, but a servant. Every real Christian must deplore such a change of Church polity for the worse; and the awful consequences of such a change.

In the second century the scale began by degrees to turn; and the distinctiveness and independency of each Church being to some extent broken, the Bishops availed themselves of this change, to increase their authority. The Bishops met frequently in Councils; and though prevented by their humility and piety from assuming at once all the rights of the people, yet they ultimately were invested with antisciptural power, which they exerted to the serious injury of the Church. The following extract, from Mosheim, may suffice to show the truthfulness of these statements. "At their first appearing in these general Councils, they acknowledged that they were no more than delegates of their respective Churches, and that they acted in the name, and by the appointment of their people. *But they soon changed this humble tone, imperceptibly extending the limits of their authority, turned their influence into dominion, and their Counsels into laws; and openly asserted, at length, that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people authoritative rules of faith and manners.*"

Here the sluiceway of despotism was thrown open, which poured forth a flood of usurpation, and confusion, and destruction upon the Church. One of the immediate effects of this usurpation was, "the establishing of a greater difference between the Christian pastors and their flocks than the genius of the Gospel admits." This, as must be perceived, originated in a spirit of pride and arrogance, which also manifested itself in a departure from their original simplicity in preaching, and in employing the *philosophy of the Heathens, and the language of the Jewish Rabbins, to express the precepts of Christ*. Thus we behold them, in the first place, usurping the rights of the people; and, in the next, struggling to *glitter and dazzle* in human learning, rather than to instruct their people, by preaching to them the pure Word of God.

The next step in this frightful course was polluting the doctrines of the Gospel. The corrupt notions of Platonism were introduced into the Church, especially as it respects the souls of philosophers and heroes entering at once, after death, into light and felicity, while those of the generality were sunk down by the weight of their lusts and passions into the infernal regions, from which they could not emerge till purified. Mosheim informs us, that "the Bishops, by an innocent allusion to the Jewish manner of speaking, had been called *Chief Priests*; the Elders or Presbyters had received the title of *Priests*; and the Deacons that of *Levites*. But in a little time these titles were abused by an aspiring Clergy, who thought proper to claim the same rank and station, the same rights and privileges that were conferred with those titles upon the Ministers of religion under the Mosaic Dispensation. Hence the rise of TITHES, FIRST-FRUITS, SPLENDID GARMENTS, and many other circumstances of external grandeur, by which Ecclesiastics were eminently distinguished." "In like manner, the comparison of the Christian oblations with the Jewish victims and sacrifices produced a multitude of unnecessary rites, and was the occasion of producing that erroneous notion of the Eucharist, which represents it as a real sacrifice, and not merely as a commemoration of the great offering that was once made upon the Cross, for the sins of mortals." All these, and many other monstrosities, immediately followed the arrogance of the priesthood: *pious frauds* were rendered prevalent; and the *expedient of a LIE, to advance the cause of TRUTH and PIETY, was regarded not only as justifiable, but even as PRAISEWORTHY!*

If we follow up the history of the Church, we shall find that in every age the corruption of the Church has kept pace with the intolerance and despotism of her Ministers. With a knowledge of the despotic power arrogated and exercised by the Clergy, we may safely and correctly estimate the corruption of the Church in every period of her history.

The third century was still more prolific of despotism in government, and corruption in doctrines and practices, than the second. The Roman Prelate, at this time, began to assert his preeminence; and though he did not at once secure all the power which was afterwards wielded by the Roman Pontiffs, still the government of the Church was, by steps almost imperceptible, advancing towards a religious monarchy. Mosheim informs us, "that the Bishops also aspired to higher degrees of authority and power than they had formerly possessed; and not only violated the rights of the people, but also made gradual encroachments upon the privileges of the Presbyters. And that they might cover those usurpations with an air of justice and appearance of reason, they published new doctrines concerning the nature of the Church, and of the episcopal dignity; which, however, were generally so obscure, that they themselves seem to have understood them as little as those to whom they were delivered." Again, he informs us, that "the Bishops, especially those who were over the most numerous and opulent assemblies, assumed a princely authority. They even appropriated to their evangelical functions the splendid ensigns of temporal majesty. By the assumption of greatness, the number of their titles, and the splendour of their gar-

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ments, they soothed the minds of the multitude into an ignorant veneration for their arrogated authority. The example of the Bishops was soon followed by the Presbyters, who neglected their duty, and abandoned themselves to *effeminate* and *luxurious* life. The Deacons followed in the train, and thus the effects of a corrupt ambition were spread through every rank of the sacred order."

Thus secularized, we may readily apprehend the result: she became as *corrupt* as she was *despotic*. This change in government "was soon followed by a train of vices which dishonoured the character and authority of those to whom the administration of the Church was committed." The evils practised by the Clergy were of the most startling character: some of them were such *gross immoralities* that we forbear to name them. Such improprieties in the Clergy naturally gave rise to innumerable evils among the membership, resembling those that were practised by their Priests.

Many striking extracts, from authentic records, all bearing upon the same point, might be adduced. We can at present furnish only a few. The fourth century was fruitful of increasing despotism and corruption. "In this century many of the most important steps were laid by which the Bishops of Rome mounted afterward to the summit of Ecclesiastical power and despotism." One of the most important of these steps was an entire exclusion of the people from the legislation of the Church; and afterward, by degrees, they divested the Presbyters of their ancient privileges, and their primitive authority, that they might have no importunate protesters, to control their ambition, or oppose their proceedings; and principally that they might either engross to themselves, or distribute as they thought proper, the possessions and revenues of the Church." All this was connected with an antiscritptural connexion of Church and State. These were prolific sources of mischief to the Church. But why, may we not ask, was such an assumption of power, such a system of oligarchy and iniquitous connection with the State, worse in the fourth, than in the nineteenth century? Was it destructive of the rights of the people then? It is destructive of the rights of the people now. Were the people made vassals to the tyranny of arrogant priests then? They are vassals to priestly power now. Nay, *they are BOUGHT, and SOLD, and TRANSFERRED, at the will of their rulers; and all this in the nineteenth century!* To prove such a system wrong and corrupt in the fourth century, is to prove it wrong and corrupt in the nineteenth. It is not a mere expedient, that may be changed at will; but vital principles are at stake: and hence such despotic rule is corrupt, under all circumstances.

After the establishment of this spiritual oligarchy, a train of vices, such as we should expect, ensued. At this time the strange notion of purgatorial flames, to purify departed souls, was set afloat; and also the celibacy of priests, and the worship of images and relics, which in process of time almost destroyed the Christian religion, or, at least, "eclipsed its lustre, and corrupted its very essence." These are the natural effects, the legitimate offspring of such a system of despotism.

Despotism and corruption contemporaneously increased, till, in the eleventh

century, the supreme power of the Roman Pontiff, over the Civil power, which had long before been sought after, was obtained; and Henry, king of England, terrified at the anathemas of the Pope, passed the Alps, amid the rigor of a severe winter, and in person supplicated the clemency of Pope Gregory. "Here the suppliant Prince, unmindful of his dignity, stood three days in the open air, at the entrance of his fortress, with his feet bare, his head uncovered, and with no other raiment but a coarse woollen cloth thrown over his body, to cover his nakedness. The fourth day he was admitted to the presence of the Lordly Pontiff, who, with a good deal of difficulty, granted him the absolution he demanded; but suspended him for a season from his throne."

I forbear further quotations; though these are but a few of the many that might be given. I feel satisfied, however, that enough has been given to satisfy every candid and unprejudiced mind, that while full legislative and judicial authority, arrogated by the Ministry, is antisciptural, it is pernicious in its influence, and destructive of the purity of the Church. Having shown in my former Lecture what is the mind of the Spirit on this point; and, in this, having given you the fearful result of a departure from Gospel principles, from authentic records of the Church, I take it for granted you must be convinced of the necessity of adhering to, and supporting those principles. Permit me, in conclusion, to urge upon you the necessity of adopting these principles, to the truth of which you must give your assent: for as long as you are subject to a system opposed to Gospel principles, you are supporting that system in *opposition* to the Gospel, and are found fighting against God. The Gospel designs to teach you the truth; and the truth, breaking off every fetter from the mind, will make you free.

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LECTURE IV.

THE VOICE OF REASON ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

"My people doth not consider."—Isaiah i. 3.

Want of consideration, though a widely-prevailing evil, and one to which fearful guilt attaches, is at the same time of that nature which awakens little apprehension in the mind. Did it, like the irruption of bold and fierce passions, give terrible alarms of conscience, then individuals remiss on this point would be made conscious of their danger, and they would awaken to consideration. Because it does not exhibit itself in flagrant crimes, people are scarcely conscious of their guilt, and this renders the evil more fatal, and the cause of the individual more dangerous. Unperceived, it insidiously saps the foundation of every Christian virtue, and finally secures apostacy from God, and ultimate ruin. In the Scriptures, we are not only warned against committing crimes, but also against neglecting duties. To omit duty is sin, as well as to commit crime; and will as effectually bring upon us the displeasure and curse of God. The duty of consideration is often, and strongly urged in the holy Scriptures. Our Saviour says, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch;" which naturally includes consideration. The Almighty urges it as a charge against Israel, that "they do not know;" and the reason he subjoins, "they do not consider." In this they are more stupid than the ox or the ass, for "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider." It is true that infidelity has been a curse to society; but perhaps its effects have not been more extensively injurious than credulity and superstition. While the Word of God denounces unbelief as a heinous and damning sin, it warns us against credulity; and forbids our receiving doctrines without sufficient evidence. The duty of investigating for our selves, and judging, deciding, receiving, and rejecting, comes to us with the authority of an Apostolic precept. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." The Creator has conferred upon us the high prerogative of free volition; and though men may enslave the body, yet the immortal mind is free. It is beyond the power of man to enslave this, our better part. But God, from whom we have received this inalienable right, holds us responsible for its proper use; and we shall

be found guilty in his sight if we do not use these rights, as much as if we had used them amiss. Wilful ignorance is, in effect, wilful sin.

I wish on the present occasion to awaken consideration, and direct it to the subject of Church Government. The intimate connexion of this subject with the vital interests of the Church will, we hope, secure to us the attention of every intelligent reader. All true Christians feel deeply solicitous for the prosperity of the Church; and all *intelligent* Christians know that the laws by which a Church is governed must exert a powerful influence upon her, either for weal or woe. Confident that the arguments advanced will obtain a candid investigation, we proceed with pleasure to the discussion of the subject; and shall feel content that the wise and good understand, and cordially embrace the truth.

Having already given you the voice of Scripture, and the testimony of history, I am persuaded that you must see that irresponsible power exercised by the Ministry over the Church is antisciptural, and destructive of her best interests. We shall, in conclusion, add to this sum, the voice of reason.

We commence by conceding, that the purest and best government that ever did, or that ever can exist, is that of irresponsible and absolute Monarchy, provided a Being of infinite perfections be employed to enact and administer laws. And hence it is that the Government of Jehovah is not only superior to every other government, but is absolutely perfect. The existence of an Absolute Monarchical Government naturally implies the existence of an infinitely perfect Legislator and Judge; and however justly these perfections are ascribed to God, yet it is evident that no finite being has any just claim to them; for infinite perfections are inconsistent with a finite being. These principles once admitted, it incontestibly follows that the establishment of all such irresponsible systems is *outraging the rights of mankind, and laying claim to the attributes and perfections of Jehovah. Infallibility belonging only to God, it would be all one to admit many Gods, as many infallible rulers.*

Irresponsible systems of Church Government have their foundation in POPERY! And I must confess I see more consistency in the claims of *real* Popery itself, than in the claims of the SEMI-POPEDOMS of the present day. The Pope, in assuming the reins of absolute monarchy, arrogates to himself absolute authority and infallibility. He assumes the high titles of *Lord God the Pope*, and acts consistent with such a profession; while our Semi-Popes, acknowledging themselves fallible men, and assuming the daring arrogance of the Pope, still establish a system of complete oligarchy, as irresponsible, and managed with as much of despotism as Popery *itself*! They disclaim the titles of the Pope, but still exercise his power. Surely, for the sake of consistency, while Popery is the principle and the practice, let it also be the name, that we may understand it.

There are too many at the present day under systems based upon Popish principles, who are still alarmed at the name of Popery. It is not the nature of the system that affrights them: they are under a similar one. Nor is it the exercise of arbitrary power that makes it so very intolerable; for they submit to power not

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less arbitrary. The fact is, they are affrighted at the appendage of a mere name. Now, it is not with mere names that we have to do, but with principles and practices. Names are but empty things; principles are the great springs of action. All irresponsible principles in Church Government, under whatever name they may exist, are at once an infringement upon the prerogatives of the Almighty, and an arrogant assumption of infallibility; which is an indispensable qualification for the management of such a system. The Word of God says, "One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." But these, by their actions, assert superiority over the brethren, and equality with the Lord Jesus Christ. They arrogate the glory of Christ, as the great Head of the Church, that they may share it with him. We shall not stop to prove the titles of "*Lord God the Pope*," and "*Lord Bishop*," and the authority exercised by these arrogant dignitaries, inconsistent with the Word of God: we might as well stop to prove midnight chill and gloom inconsistent with noonday warmth and radiance; but we will inquire a little into the system of those who, though they decried *Papery* and *Episcopacy*, yet meet in council, independent of the membership, and enact and administer laws to the people, thus binding them *vassals to priestly power and despotism!* There is the same irresponsible system, though varied a little in the exterior; yet necessarily implying infallibility in its rulers. Though one individual dares not assume infallibility alone, yet the *Conference* assumes it, as a legislative assembly. It uncontestedly follows that the great difference between those irresponsible "*Conferences*" and *Papery* consists in this, that *one frail man in Rome constitutes a Pope*, while of this it requires a whole *Conference* to make a *Pope!* That both these systems (or, rather, both those variations of the one system) are antisciptural and pernicious, is abundantly obvious; but as to which of the two is most frightful in deformity, destructive to the interests of truth and piety, and insulting to God, I must leave you to determine.

In order to consistency in Government, there must be either infallibility in legislators and judges, or else there must be responsibility. Now, as infallibility is utterly out of the question, being inconsistent with a finite existence, we are driven to responsibility, as the only alternative. Every system of irresponsible Government lays claim to the Almighty's perfections; and adds to this daring arrogance an insult to human reason, and an outrage upon common rights. We are all born with equal rights, though all are not born under the same circumstances. Some may be rich, and others poor; yet our moral rights are the same. Whoever attempts to trammel us in the exercise of our own judgment, steps quite beyond his province—infringes upon our inalienable rights, and sins against God. And it is equally absurd to think, or to compel him to think according to any fixed rule of human invention. Those usurpations are antisciptural and absurd. The Bible declares we are all brethren; all possessed of equal rights. The very state of our existence here is sufficient to teach us our responsibility to each other, and to God. We are necessary for each other's happiness, and are united by innumerable obligations and dependencies, all of which teach us that we are brethren. But despotism strikes at the very root of this happy compact, and raises up sepa-

rate interests, alien to the nature and principles of the Christian Church, and destructive to her prosperity and happiness.

Responsibility is necessary, in order to the cultivation of honesty. It was a saying of Kilham, and one which he frequently used, "Honesty will never shrink from responsibility;" and a greater than Kilham has said, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. But he that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." We must naturally expect that the stream will resemble the fountain from whence it flows; and who could expect else from the foul fountain of despotism than streams of intolerance, arrogance, deception, and tyranny! The very system of doing things in the dark, without the knowledge and co-operation of the membership, naturally tends to deception and intrigue. If there is nothing objectionable in the working of the system, why not admit the light of investigation? why so careful to exclude the light? "They that do good come to the light, that their deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." But is not this the secret of the matter? "They that do evil hate the light, neither come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved!"

But, throw open those hidden courts: admit the light of investigation: secure the co-operation of the membership, and at once the hidden works of darkness will begin to recede, as the light advances; till darkness gives place to light, tyranny and oppression to equality and brotherly kindness, deception and intrigue to honesty and integrity, and oligarchy to responsibility. If no hidden works of dishonesty are carried on in these legislative assemblies of the Church, then the admission of the laity can do no harm; and if those evils do exist, this will bring them to the light, and exclude them from the Church.

Responsibility is necessary, in order to intelligence in a Church. It is utterly impossible to communicate intelligence to an individual who will not think, investigate, and judge for himself. It is indispensable that the mind exercise her powers, in order to the attainment of knowledge. The mind shackled by despotism is not prepared to receive information; and the first step in the enlightenment of that mind is to break off its chains, and to make it to understand that it is free. Indeed, how could those people investigate for the truth of a doctrine, when they have been trained to believe that they have no right to investigate for proof, but to receive what is given them by their Ministers; and every effort on their part to investigate for themselves is misconstrued into "a want of confidence in their Ministers." It is true every Church should esteem its Minister very highly, in love, for his works' sake; but this esteem for their Minister is to result from *knowing* him. Our confidence in our Minister is not to supersede the exercise of our own judgment. We are in no place commanded to esteem our Minister before we know him. Paul says, "I beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among you, and are over you in the Lord; and to esteem them very highly, in love, for their work's sake." But here, observe, you are first to know them, and be convinced of their good works; and then you are to esteem them in conse-

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quence. But while their works are secreted from the Church, how can this knowledge be obtained? and, consequently, from what source is this respect due? But excluding the membership from the legislation of the Church, you shut out the light from them; and prevent them from obtaining anything like a knowledge of the system by which they are governed; and this, forsooth! upon the plea, "*the members know TOO MUCH ALREADY.*" Here is the same old doctrine over again, "*Ignorance is the mother of devotion.*" Under those systems of despotism, ignorance is cultivated in luxuriant growth, in order to render the people easy of infatuation. How degrading and low, and how unworthy the energies of a Gospel Minister is the office of cultivating ignorance, and blinding the people—the infatuated vassals of priestly tyranny, for the purpose of holding dominion over them?

Responsibility is necessary, in order to check the aspirations of priestly ambition. There is too much of deceit about the human heart to be trusted with absolute authority. I do not say that all Ministers under irresponsible government have abused their (too great) power; but this I do say, that too many have. And because a few individuals have passed by precipices in safety, when hundreds of others have been killed, does not prove that there is no danger. The natural egotism of the human heart is by far too frequently underrated: we are never safe in the possession of antisciptural power: the very possession of it is in itself a sin; besides, it exposes us to temptation and ruin. We have a fearful view of the too common influence of prosperity and power upon the human mind, in the case of Hazael, king of Assyria. While in an humble station in life, he was foretold of the outrage he should afterward commit: he was struck with horror, and replied, "*But what, is thy servant a dog?*" His feelings at that time were not capable of such barbarity; but a change of circumstances produced a change in his feelings. He ascended the throne; pride took possession of his heart; he became despotic and cruel; and ultimately filled up the full measure of the iniquity which the man of God foretold him, and at which, under other circumstances, he shuddered to think of. Arbitrary and despotic power is a dangerous thing. O how many have split upon this rock, and made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience! Though we admit the possibility of possessing arbitrary power without injury to ourselves or to others, yet it is *barely possible, and far from probable.* The very fact of possessing such power is antisciptural, and out of the way of duty: the person possessing it is exposed to strong temptation, and it is a mere mercy if he does not fall into pride and despotism. O how many pious young men have unwarily fallen into this snare, and, becoming despotic tyrants, have been rendered a curse to religion, which, under other circumstances, they would have ornamented and blest! They ventured on Satan's ground, and out of the path of duty; and when they have met the foe they have found themselves shorn of their strength, and they have fallen an easy prey to the hand of their enemy. Had these young men been placed under a system of responsibility, they would have retained their humility and piety; and instead of Lording it over God's heritage, to the injury of the Church, they would have been servants of the

Church, zealously and efficiently labouring to promote the glory of God, and secure the prosperity of the Church.

Responsibility is necessary in order to secure the happy co-operation of the whole Church. However pious and efficient a Minister may be: whatever the grade of his talent, the ardency of his zeal, or the depth of his piety, yet he will effect little unless he can awaken and enlist the energies of the whole Church. If the Church remains cold and indolent, he will soon become discouraged; the fervour of his zeal will abate, and his labours become less assiduous. It is impossible things should remain long in such a state: either his spirit of zeal and piety will spread through the Church, and excite them to activity; or else his zeal, chilled with the cold, phlegmatic spirit of the Church, will lose its warmth, and he will sink down with the rest into apathy. Much of the success of the Gospel is made to depend upon the prayers of the Church; and hence Paul solicits the prayers of the Church for the success of the Gospel, and says, "Brethren pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified." But how, I ask, shall this co-operation be secured? Is it by excluding the laity from all matters of legislation, and setting up interests separate from their's in the Church? Surely not. The most successful way in which it can be done is by uniting them as closely as possible with all the workings of the Church. Convince them that there are no separate interests, but one common interest; and make them to feel their individual and mutual obligations and responsibilities; and thus we shall secure the rights of the whole Church, and the happy co-operation of one part with another.

Thus we have glanced at a few of the arguments in favour of responsibility in Church government, and the equality of Church members. We have instanced a number of cases in which the exercise of despotic power has been followed with results the most fatal to the peace and prosperity of the Church: reason teaches us the same cause would again produce corruption and ruin. The matter being so clear, from the testimony of Scripture, the records of history, and the voice of reason, that of those who still remain in doubt it may be said, *that while "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, this people doth not know, they do not consider."*

These principles of Church government are the distinguishing marks between the New Connexion and the Wesleyan Churches. We account these principles of vital importance; they were the ground of separation from the Wesleyan Body at first; and the ground of distinctiveness from that time to the present. Our system of Church government is *representative* throughout; their's *ex-officio* and *irresponsible*. For daring to think for ourselves, and consulting the Word of God and our own consciences, we have been calumniated; and epithets and anathemas have been poured upon us, with an unsparing hand. But the storm begins now to abate; and the sun of prosperity to shine upon us.

It is in consequence of our conscious adherence to these principles that the tongue and pen of *vituperation* have been awakened against us in this place; and the opprobrium of "heretics," and "schismatics," &c., have been poured upon

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us, with such malicious spirit. It is true we have suffered but little: *our boyish antagonists have only exhibited their own spirit, without doing us any real harm.* "The Lord has been on our side; we have not been moved."

In conclusion, I call upon you to weigh the arguments we have adduced: compare them with the Word of God and with reason; and, as far as they agree with these rules, receive them. You must be aware of the importance of the subject; then treat it accordingly. I apprehend this objection may arise, "I cannot remedy the evil: I am excluded from the legislation of the Church, consequently not responsible for those evils which I cannot remove." Now, this excuse is good for nothing at all. Who deprived you of your rights in this matter? Not the Almighty; and no one else had any right to do it. If you have no voice in the legislation of the Church, this is wrong in itself: you ought to have it. God gave it you; reason gives it you; and how comes it to pass you do not possess it? Have arrogant priests wrested it from your hands? You had no right to resign it up to them: they had no right to demand it from you. God gave it to *you*, not to them; and he holds *you* responsible for it. They cannot assume your responsibilities, so as to clear you in the sight of God; and hence you will both be found guilty: they for *demanding*, and you for *yielding* your rights up to them. It then becomes your duty at once to assert your rights; and exert your influence for the establishment of Church Government on Gospel principles. Do you say the thing is hopeless; the majority is against you? This argument would apply with equal consistency to all the evils of the day. But are you, therefore, to countenance them, because you cannot remove them? and so "run with the multitude to do evil." Surely not. It is still your duty to oppose your influence against those practices. If you cannot remedy the evil in the Church to which you are joined: if it deprives you of those rights which God has given you, it becomes your duty (though painful it may be) to separate yourself from her, and maintain and exercise your rights. Array yourselves with the people of God, where you can exercise your Christian rights and privileges.

Remember, that while you are under a system of despotism, and calmly submitting to it, you are giving it your countenance and support; and thus, in opposition to the principles of Gospel truth, you are supporting error, and violating your consciences. Be convinced in the matter; then act with decision. If it be right, support and defend it; if wrong, renounce and oppose it. It is a matter of serious moment, exerting, as it does, a decisive influence upon the cause of truth. It demands your prompt attention. Then, if you love Zion, awaken to her interest; and array yourselves against the evil that threatens her destruction.

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